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## HYSTERON PROTERON

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There seems to be a considerable lack of uniformity in the use of the term "hysteron proteron." The reason for this state of affairs is to be found doubtless, in part at least, in the fact that while everyone has a more or less general notion what hysteron proteron is, very few on short notice could frame for it an entirely satisfactory definition. On the whole it might not be unfair to say that the construction is regarded generally as a rather doubtful license. Sometimes it is treated jocosely, as a case of "the cart before the horse"; and Menge records the following sober judgment: "Hysteron proteron, strictly speaking, is a blemish that should not be glossed over by calling it a figure of speech."<sup>1</sup>

If this general impression is correct—that is, if hysteron proteron is a blemish that indicates carelessness and haste in composition—one might expect that editors would be slow to apply this name to a phrase found in such a passage as the following: Cic. *In Cat.* iv. 10. 21: "Sit Scipio ille clarus, cuius consilio atque virtute Hannibal in Africam redire atque Italia decedere coactus est." This sentence stands at the beginning of the noble and striking period in which Cicero claims for himself a place among the immortals of Roman history. At this point his eloquence is at full tide; and it seems incredible that a striking "blemish" in this passage could have escaped his eye when the speech was revised for publication, even if we assume that the original draft was perhaps marred by some infelicities. Yet the commentary on this passage runs somewhat as follows: "An example of a figure called hysteron proteron, in which the order of the facts is reversed"; "A good example of hysteron proteron, the reversing of the natural order of ideas; of course the leaving Italy preceded the returning to Africa"; and so on.

<sup>1</sup> Translation of *Repetit. der lat. Syntax u. Stilistik*<sup>8</sup>, § 551. 22.

Even without giving any particular thought to the subject, most readers will feel instinctively that this sort of commentary does injustice to the passage on which it is based. A little careful analysis will show at once the correctness of this instinctive feeling. Compare the three following expressions: (1) "One of the men was badly hurt. He fell from his horse"; (2) "One of the men was badly hurt through falling from his horse"; (3) "One of the men was badly hurt, and fell from his horse." If these three expressions refer to one and the same occurrence, we should say that (1) and (2) are perfectly normal, but that (3) is a case of *hysteron proteron* so violent that it could not be condoned on any ground.

Yet it should not escape notice that in (1) and (2) there is just the same "reversal of the natural order of events," and that trouble with (3) arises solely from the fact that the copulative conjunction "and" is interjected between the clauses. Here is the key to the whole situation. It is true, of course, that in the great majority of cases, the Latin copulative conjunctions express adequately the relation of the clauses between which they stand; but there are numerous other examples in which *et*, *-que*, and *atque* are used to join clauses referring to events whose inner connection cannot be brought out explicitly by the use of such colorless connectives as these. In these cases there is necessarily something *implicit* in the expression;<sup>1</sup> and when this implication falls within certain limits it is quite possible to construct sentences in which clauses connected by *et*, *-que*, or *atque* "reverse the natural order of events" without in the slightest degree transgressing the laws of logic.

This matter may be approached most simply through such an example as the following: Cic. *In Cat.* iii. 5. 10: "Tum Cethegus, qui paulo ante aliquid tamen de gladiis ac siccis . . . . respondisset, dixissetque se semper bonorum ferramentorum studiosum fuisse, recitatis litteris . . . . repente conticuit." In this passage it will

<sup>1</sup> A very striking illustration of this principle is seen in sentences where *et* or *neque* introduce adversative clauses; e.g., Cic. *In Cat.* ii. 8. 18: "Tu agris, tu aedificiis, tu argento, tu familia, tu rebus omnibus ornatus et copiosus sis, et dubites de possessione detrahare, adquirere ad fidem?" In this outburst Cicero is not expressing indignation that the persons referred to are rich—his anger burns because they are rich *and yet* (*et*) hesitate to effect a settlement of their debts by parting with some of their holdings.

be noted that *-que* does not append a new clause descriptive of a second action following the one first mentioned; the added clause merely repeats the information given in the first clause, but in a more specific way. Somewhat different is the following: Caes. *B.C.* i. 40. 3: "Subito vi ventorum et aquae magnitudine pons est interruptus *et* reliqua multitudo equitum interclusa." In the clause here appended by *et* it is possible to see a lingering trace of the explicative function; but, at the same time, the words describe a *logical consequence* of the happening mentioned in the preceding clause. Part of the troops had crossed the bridge without accident; now wind and water sweep away the bridge, *and thereby (et)* cut off the rest of the horsemen.<sup>1</sup>

Interpreted in the light of a passage like this, the phrase "Hannibal in Africam redire atque Italia decedere coactus est" becomes luminous—Hannibal was forced to return to Africa and (thereby) to relieve Italy of his presence. We may call this a case of *hysteron proteron*, provided that a definition for that term broad enough to cover such examples as these be adopted; but we cannot afford to lose sight of the fact that the logic of this sentence is sound, and that the phrasing is fully worthy of the striking context in which the words stand.

Another passage, even more famous than this, has fared rather badly at the hands of the editors: Verg. *Aen.* ii. 353: "Moriatur *et* in media arma ruamus." The commentary, for the most part, runs as follows: "An illustration of *hysteron proteron* (reversal of ideas)"; "The natural order of the ideas is reversed. This license is termed *hysteron proteron*"; "Often explained as an instance of *hysteron proteron*, i.e., 'cart before the horse.'"

Various prose examples point the way to the correct interpretation of this passage. Thus, when the defeated Pompeians had taken refuge in their camp after losing the day at Pharsalus, Caesar says of his own action: Caes. *B.C.* iii. 95. 1: "Caesar . . . milites cohortatus est, ut beneficio Fortunae uterentur castraque oppugnarent." In this sentence the function of the clause appended by *-que* may seem at first sight purely explicative; yet another notion readily obtrudes, namely that of action *logically*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. also Caes. *B.C.* i. 41. 4 (*atque*); i. 81. 4 *fin.* (*et*); iii. 46. 4 (*-que*).

*preliminary*; for it is *by attacking the camp* that the soldiers may hope to secure the boon that fortune is throwing in their way. Interpreted thus, the meaning of the sentence is: "Caesar urged the soldiers to seize the boon offered by fortune, *and thereto* (i.e., to that end) to assault the camp." Much more striking is the following example: Caes. *B.C.* iii. 98. 3: "Hac adhibita diligentia, ex castris sibi legiones alias occurrere et eas, quas secum duxerat, invicem requiescere *atque* in castra reverti iussit." The troops now with Caesar are wearied with extra service. He therefore sends to his camp for fresh forces, ordering the wearied legions to take in their turn a period of rest, *and thereto* (i.e., to that end) to march back to camp.<sup>1</sup>

With the help of these parallels, there should be no difficulty in interpreting "Moriatur et in media arma ruamus." The meaning is: "Let us die, and (to that end) let us plunge into the thick of the fight." Though offering no parallel or explanation, Conington's feeling for this passage is unerring. His note runs: "*Moriatur et ruamus* is not exactly a case of ὕστερον πρότερον. The first thing that Aeneas had to do was to persuade his comrades to die; the next to tell them how to do it."

Evidently our procedure in this matter needs to be standardized in some way. As things now are, a certain stigma attaches itself to the term *hysteron proteron*, and yet editors apply the name with great freedom to noble passages that are both sound in logic and beyond criticism in point of style. Uniformity could be attained in either of two ways: first (as was hinted above), by adopting a definition of *hysteron proteron* broad enough to cover cases in which "the natural order of events is reversed," but which are sound in logic and correct in style; or, second (as Conington would seem to prefer), by limiting the use of the term *hysteron proteron* strictly to passages in which there is real infelicity of expression. In any case, a great deal more attention might be devoted with profit to the elements that are often implicit in the relation between clauses connected by *et*, *-que*, and *atque*.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. also Caes. *B.G.* vi. 34. 5 *fin.* (*-que*); *B.C.* iii. 45. 4 (*et*).